"CONGRATS, IT'S A CRIMINAL"

A parenting guideline

By Esha Sohail

Writer's Note:

Alhamdulillah, all praise belongs to Allah Almighty for granting me the ability to write and illuminate this crucial topic. This mini-book is intended to raise awareness about the subtle yet profound harms that parents may unknowingly inflict upon their children. It addresses some of the prevailing biases and injustices within contemporary parenting practices.

Islamic examples have been thoughtfully included to provide guidance. The writing has been refined with the assistance of ChatGPT to ensure clarity and impact, without changing the original message.

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Congratulations, you gave birth to a criminal

Have you ever heard the phrase**, *"Congratulations, you gave birth to a criminal"*?** Of course, the answer is no. Whenever a child is born, the doctors congratulate the parents by announcing**, *"It's a boy!"* or *"It's a girl!"***—but never have they proclaimed, *"It's a criminal."* So, how are criminals created? **Do parents play a role in this transformation?** To address this question, one needs only watch one or two criminal documentaries. In most cases, the individuals who later become criminals were once victims within their own homes. It is often within the domestic environment that a criminal is shaped.

Repeatedly, one hears criminals recount how they were mistreated by their parents—exposed to violence, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, or relentless psychological distress. It becomes evident that a child, at birth, is akin to a blank slate—a concept famously articulated by the philosopher **John Locke**. The infant enters the world as a passive observer of their surroundings, and among the most influential elements of that environment are the parents.

Parents are the child's first point of interaction with the world; they serve as role models. When that model is dysfunctional or damaged, the child, too, becomes disrupted. Furthermore, you must be aware of the well-established fact that approximately 80% of the human brain develops by the age of seven. So, with whom does the child spend most of their formative years? Precisely—**the parents**.

Hence, before condemning a criminal for their actions, one must first examine the role of their parents. The upbringing of a child is a decisive factor in determining who that child will become later in life. The young mind is comparable to an empty vessel, and it is entirely up to the guardians whether they choose to fill it with refreshing, nourishing substance—or with something toxic.

Let me clarify: this is by no means an endorsement or justification of criminal behavior. Rather, the purpose is to highlight the necessity of examining what the child might have endured before we rush to judge the adult. Experiencing abuse and violence during childhood can devastate a developing brain, much like a person being slowly poisoned over time. A child deprived of healthy emotional development may come to believe that the only way to confront the world is through shouting, aggression, and violent behavior.

Such individuals often form a hardened perception of the world. They begin to view it through a lens that was placed over their eyes in early childhood. It is frequently observed that if the mother is domineering or hostile, the child may develop a belief that all women are inherently the same, leading them to distance themselves from that gender entirely.

In the **DSM-5**—the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—there exists a classification known as **Conduct Disorder**. Simply put, this refers to the most severe form of psychopathic behavior observed in children—behavior that blatantly disregards and violates the rights of others. Most

instances of conduct disorder manifest during childhood, especially in those who have experienced a troubled upbringing.

In **Islam**, there exists strong accountability for any form of violence and abuse. You might be aware of the fact that domestic abuse encompasses various forms, including:

- Physical violence (e.g., hitting, slapping, choking)
- Emotional abuse (e.g., insults, humiliation, threats)
- Verbal abuse (e.g., shouting, degrading speech)
- Sexual abuse
- Financial control or deprivation
- Psychological manipulation

Whether inflicted upon a spouse, child, parent, or any other household member, it is unequivocally **haram** (prohibited).

"Not All Scars Are Worth Passing On"

Many of us have likely heard the familiar refrain from our parents: ***"We were raised the same way, so there's no reason to question our parenting."*** Yet this rationale is deeply flawed. Your child is not destined to run in the same relentless hamster wheel you once found yourself trapped in. Perhaps your own parents questioned their upbringing, too, only to be met with the same dismissive justifications. However, the time has come to acknowledge that a substantial generational divide separates you from your child—culturally, emotionally, and psychologically.

If you were subjected to mistreatment, emotional neglect, or toxic discipline, what moral reasoning compels you to inflict the same on your child? **Visualize the absurdity:** imagine you are struck by a car while crossing the street, leaving you with a broken leg. Upon returning home, you deliberately break your child's leg so they can understand your suffering. Would such an act reflect wisdom or madness?

Undoubtedly, it would be considered sheer lunacy. So why, then, would one deliberately subject their child to the same emotional or psychological turmoil they themselves endured? The logic collapses under the weight of its own cruelty**. If your parents neglected or abused you, it is time to face the difficult truth:** what you experienced was not normal parenting—it was harmful. Recognizing this is not betrayal; it is liberation. To perpetuate the very methods that once caused your own suffering is neither justifiable nor admirable.

Instead of recreating the pain of the past, choose to break the cycle. Allow your child to experience the safety, warmth, and stability that you were once denied. There is no honour in repeating generational trauma under the guise of tradition. A wise and empathetic parent strives to create the kind of environment they once longed for, not replicate the one that failed them.

Your child was not brought into this world to carry the burdens you once bore. There is no intelligence in overwhelming a soul with more weight than it can bear. What is even more disconcerting is the justification some parents offer: ***"We are burdening the child so they will learn how to carry the weight of life."*** But surely, there are more thoughtful, humane ways to prepare a young mind for the realities of existence.

It is not a strength to throw a child into life's chaos as though hurling them into a bullring, waving a red flag, and expecting resilience to emerge from fear. A far more effective and compassionate approach is to accompany your child as they confront the unknown—offering your presence as a source of strength, rather than withdrawing into absence and forcing them to face a flood of unfamiliar stimuli alone.

"Beneath the Stars: When Home Becomes a Warzone"

You may have witnessed an elderly man breaking down in tears over unresolved childhood trauma, even well into his sixties. Or perhaps you've encountered individuals living on the streets, recounting the brutality of their early lives—individuals who ultimately chose homelessness over the supposed comfort of their own homes**. Imagine preferring the cold, unforgiving streets to the warmth of a familiar bed.** Have you ever truly contemplated what compels a person to make such a choice?

The answer lies in a profound truth: no matter how materially privileged a person may be, the absence of inner peace renders all external comforts meaningless. Time and again, those who end up on the streets are not necessarily deprived of the means to survive, but rather of the emotional safety and psychological tranquility they so desperately need. To them, **sleeping beneath the stars is far more bearable than resting in an environment that resembles a warzone**. You may feel that I'm being hyperbolic by using the term "**warzone**," but speak to those in your own surroundings who have endured traumatic childhoods, and you will come to realize the accuracy of the comparison.

As I emphasized earlier, childhood experiences cast the longest shadows—they shape not only our emotional framework but our entire perception of life. Childhood is the prologue to one's story, and a fractured beginning often leads to a troubled narrative. **After all, a film that begins on a joyful note tends**

to have a happy ending, and the same can often be said of life.

To those preparing to embark on the journey of parenthood, I offer this earnest advice: Be ever vigilant of your behavior and language in the presence of your child. If conflict arises between you and your partner, address it discreetly and away from your child's gaze. **Avoid harsh words and abusive language**, and as for violence, it must be unequivocally condemned. No matter how old your child is, no one—especially a child—should ever be subjected to violence or emotional harm.

As a psychology student, I have come to an unsettling realization**: the vast majority of psychological disorders in children are deeply rooted in parenting**. Choose any psychological condition, and trace it back to its origin—you will invariably arrive at the influence of parental behavior. Disorders such as ADHD, autism, anxiety, and even schizophrenia often reveal strong correlations with the nature of early childhood environments. This underscores a critical point: what a child endures in their formative years can not only foster destructive tendencies but can also precipitate severe mental instability.

I Should Have Given Birth to Stones

Have you ever observed how a friend, who from your perspective appears to be thriving, confides that they feel utterly useless? Despite evident accomplishments, they describe themselves as purposeless or even burdensome to their parents. How does someone, seemingly successful through the lens of an outsider, arrive at such a diminished view of themselves?

The answer lies within the title of this chapter. In many Asian cultures, the phrase ***"I should have given birth to stones"*** is frequently used by mothers—not as a literal expression, but as a cutting remark directed at their children. A child who is repeatedly subjected to such disparaging language inevitably internalizes a deep sense of inadequacy. Regardless of what they achieve—**even if they were to set foot on the moon or conquer Mars**—they would still feel unworthy, because they were conditioned from an early age to believe they would never be enough.

Let this be clear: a parent who perpetually complains or diminishes their child's efforts raises children who view themselves as worthless. When a child is constantly reminded that their efforts fall short—that they should have performed better academically or excelled further in life—it gradually erodes their sense of purpose. They grow up with the painful awareness that their struggles will go unnoticed and that their hard work will never be recognized or validated.

The psychological impact of being labeled "**useless**" by one's own parents is profound. Even if the entire world stands in

ovation, it pales in comparison to a single, sincere word of affirmation from a parent. For a child, the validation they crave most does not come from the applause of strangers, but from the voices of their mother and father. A simple phrase—***"You've done well, I'm proud of you,"*** **or** ***"I believe in your potential to do even greater things"***—can mean infinitely more than public praise.

Incorporating affirming, uplifting language into your child's life can open doors to untapped creativity and potential. Speak encouragement into their world, and you'll witness talents emerge that might have otherwise remained hidden beneath the weight of self-doubt.

When a child is incessantly subjected to belittling or corrosive phrases, they inevitably begin to question the very essence of their existence. Such constant verbal erosion can thrust them into an existential crisis—one where they interrogate their purpose, their value, and their relevance in the world. Gradually, they begin to doubt their innate talents and creative potential, relinquishing their aspirations and drifting through life in a state of emotional numbness—alive in body, but dead in spirit, like a walking phantom.

Yet, in the midst of this silent devastation, parents often proclaim, ***"We gave our child everything—why have they not flourished?"*** What they fail to grasp is that they withheld the most vital gift of all: the power of affirmation. Words of encouragement, spoken with sincerity, have the capacity to reorient an entire life.

A child deprived of affirmation may toil endlessly for recognition, yet when they grow older, even the belated praise of their parents cannot undo the damage. The sense of worthlessness has already been etched into their psyche like an indelible scar. From an early age, they were led to believe they were a burden—that their existence had rendered their parents' lives a living hell.

More Than Survival: Nurturing a Child's Soul"

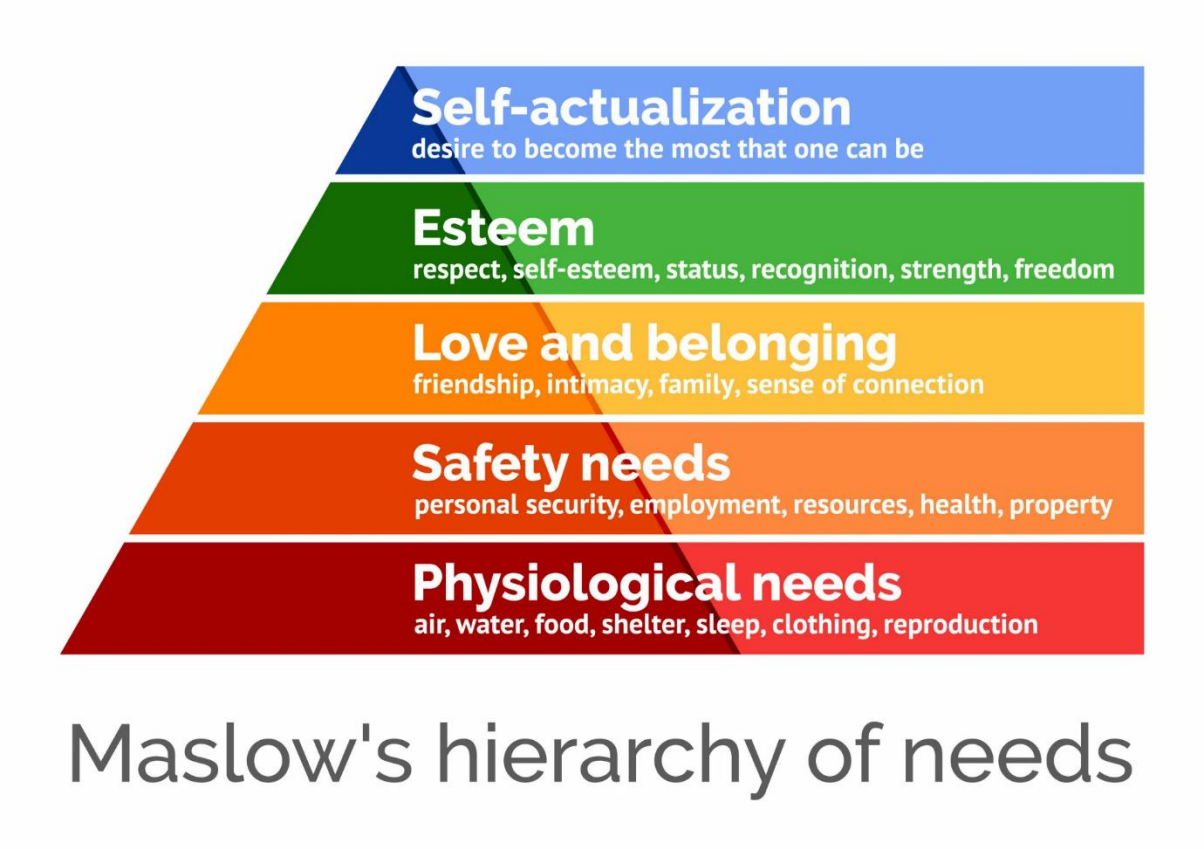
I may sound somewhat blunt by phrasing this statement, but the truth remains unchanged**: if you are not prepared, do not bring a fragile child into this world.** If you are uncertain about how you will fulfill their basic needs—which I consider to extend beyond mere food and water to encompass love, affirmation, comfort, safety, and security—then you must reconsider.

Renowned psychologist **Abraham Maslow** proposed his theory of the **hierarchy of needs**, which I believe every parent should familiarize themselves with. To simplify, Maslow asserted that for an individual to realize their full potential, certain foundational needs positioned at the lower levels of the hierarchy must first be met. If these fundamental needs remain unfulfilled, it becomes apparent that the individual will struggle to ascend toward self-actualization, as they are preoccupied with survival at more basic levels.

Although some **critics** point out that a few of the world's most creative minds have seemingly leapt directly from fulfilling physiological needs to actualizing their potential, it is important to recognize that such individuals are exceptional exceptions. Only a small minority of people are willing to forgo satisfying their more basic needs to pursue higher goals—and even that is not inherently negative. **After all, we are human beings, endowed with emotions**, and each of us deserves the right to meet our fundamental needs first.

Moreover, I believe the vast majority would prefer to secure satisfaction at the foundational levels before striving toward self-actualization**. Realizing one's potential is, after all, synonymous with fulfilling one's goals and purpose.** Every goal inevitably involves obstacles and challenges that must be confronted.

During such times, reassurance from parents or partners is not merely desirable but essential. A sense of safety and security becomes indispensable to persevere through struggles and continue progressing toward one's aspirations.


Self-actualization
desire to become the most that one can be
Esteem
respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom
Love and belonging
friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection
Safety needs
personal security, employment, resources, health, property
Physiological needs
air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

"Beyond Basic Needs: The Heart of Parenting"

Don't be taken aback; I am certain you have encountered the phrase: ***"We provide you with water, food, and shelter—isn't that enough? In our time, we lacked even these basic amenities; you are ungrateful."*** But have you ever watched a documentary on National Geographic or any other nature program?

Consider the facts: A monkey mother carries her infant for four to six months in her womb and nurtures her young for about a year. During this period, she provides not only sustenance—food, water, and shelter—but also imparts essential survival skills, and fosters a sense of security and belonging. A lioness hunts diligently for her cubs and shields them from predators. Certain male birds dedicate months to gathering nourishment for the mother and her offspring. Every animal, insect, and bird fulfills the fundamental needs of their young—and importantly, **none delegate this sacred responsibility to a babysitter.**

If you believe that simply meeting basic physical needs qualifies one as a parent, think again. Parenting is widely misunderstood as merely fulfilling these necessities; yet, it encompasses so much more. To be a true parent, one must provide safety, security, reassurance, love, and unwavering care**. Since when has the standard of parenting been so depreciated?** If the benchmarks for success in other realms of life are set so high, why are the expectations for parenting any lower?

I do not claim that providing for a child is effortless, but one must remember that bringing a child into the world is a deliberate choice. If you feel ill-prepared or unworthy, then strive first to develop the essential qualities required. Indeed, a child who is materially deprived but enveloped in love, care, and a sense of belonging can often rise above those hardships.

I frequently meet individuals living in humble huts whose children exhibit far better mental health than many who enjoy luxurious lifestyles. **The question is: how and why?**

Acceptance.

Yes, I have observed that regardless of their circumstances, these parents honor their children's struggles—they ensure that no effort goes unrecognized. They embrace their children unconditionally, regardless of appearance. They celebrate their unique qualities and individuality. They respect their perspectives and cherish their opinions. They value every penny earned by their children and openly convey their love.

This is a **profound rarity** in middle-class or affluent families.

A man once witnessed the **Prophet Muhammad** ﷺ kissing his grandson and said, "I have ten children and have never kissed any of them." The **Prophet** ﷺ replied:
"He who does not show mercy will not be shown mercy."
— (Bukhari and Muslim)

This is the timeless wisdom of our **Prophet Muhammad** ﷺ, yet it is regrettable how often we disregard such hadiths. Tragically, **we have sugarcoated our faith**—selecting only what pleases us while neglecting the rest. This is hypocrisy at its most glaring.

"The Hollow Child Within: Unveiling the Origins of People-Pleasing"

Have you ever encountered the phrase, ***"I can't live without you"?*** Where does this utterance truly originate? Often, we assume it springs from the lips of an adult whose partner has decided to leave them. Yet, on a more profound level, it is the **voice of a child** who has felt unloved, neglected, and unwanted for countless years—a child who once yearned to connect with their parents, who longed to lean on them in moments of hardship; who sought a shoulder to weep upon, a reassuring goodnight embrace, a bedtime story gently read by their parent.

This child craved guidance on emotional resilience and how much to trust and depend on others. With trembling hands, they once reached to hold their parents' hands, pleaded and begged for affection, desiring to be held close and comforted with the assurance that, eventually, everything would make sense. They longed to hear their parents say, ***"Even if the world turns its back on you, we will stand by your side."***

Now, this forsaken child—once abandoned by their parents—implores others not to leave, for those others may have offered a mere drop of the love, care, and security that was absent throughout their formative years. So, what has this child evolved into?

A people pleaser—or perhaps a supplicant of emotional validation.

Reflect on this: How often have you truly come home and shared your innermost feelings with your parents? How many

times have you wept on their shoulder? Held their hand? Sought solace in their embrace when internally broken? Confided in them about your struggles? Engaged in meaningful conversations at the dinner table? Expressed your sense of worthlessness or rejection? Asked them how much reliance on others is appropriate.

For many, the answer is none—or maybe once. And after a cold dismissal, you never attempted again. **I empathize if this rings true for you;** sadly, most of us grapple with this painful reality. This is not an indictment of parents, but a candid acknowledgment of a harsh truth.

Imagine this scenario: You arrive home to find the refrigerator bare, with no food to be found. Unable to endure the pangs of hunger, you rush to the nearest grocery store. Now, substitute that refrigerator with your fundamental needs for belonging, safety, and security.

Many parents today lament that their children engage in harmful relationships at a tender age and blame technology for this. But perhaps I err—should I blame technology for my hunger pangs? Or should I suppress my needs until I starve to the point where I might prefer ingesting something harmful rather than confronting an empty refrigerator? The logic is undeniable, isn't it?

I am not suggesting that one should abandon self-discipline—you certainly must exercise it. However, parents must ensure the refrigerator is stocked before reproaching their children. If the refrigerator is full and the child still seeks

harmful connections, then parents are justified in their admonitions.

Allow me to share a beautiful hadith:

Hadith:
Anas (RA) reported: ***"I never saw anyone more compassionate toward children than Allah's Messenger."*** — (Sahih Muslim)

He permitted Hasan and Husayn to climb upon his back during prayer, exemplifying his patience, tolerance, and boundless affection.

Parenting or Possessing?

You've likely heard this statement from many friends:
"It was once my dream to become a doctor, engineer, artist, novelist, or technician — but my parents discouraged me, saying it wasn't a respectable profession, so I abandoned it."

For God's sake, allow your children the freedom to pursue their dreams and ambitions**.** Let them follow the path they feel destined for. They are aware of their own capabilities and understand how and where to apply them. Tragically, many parents become a significant obstacle in their children's journey, on top of the numerous challenges the world already throws at them.

And what is the outcome?

Bitterness.
Yes, you heard me correctly. The child begins to harbor deep-seated resentment towards their parents. Sadly, many such children choose to distance themselves — emotionally and physically — as soon as they reach adulthood. And honestly, I don't believe such parents have the right to complain. If God Himself has granted every individual the autonomy to choose their life's path, who are we to take that away?

There's a profound phrase I'd like to share:
"Know yourself, and you will know God."

But how does self-awareness lead to an understanding of God?

Have you ever found yourself thanking the creators of the internet for enabling you to stay connected with distant loved

ones? Similarly, when a person discovers their inner potential — when they recognize their purpose, identify their goals, and realize their ability to accomplish them — they inevitably reflect on the source of that potential. And that realization, my friend, leads directly to Allah Almighty. One understands that it was He who instilled that potential for a divine purpose.

But tragically, this very potential is often suppressed — not by strangers, but by one's own parents.

So my sincere appeal to all parents:
Let your children dream. Let them grow. Let them become who they were meant to be.
Every human being is born with a unique set of talents and an innate desire to create positive change in the world. But **when that potential is denied its rightful expression, it often finds darker, destructive outlets.**

Too often, I've seen parents attempt to relive their unfulfilled dreams through their children. Once again, let me make it clear:
Your child is not your property.
He or she is an individual with distinct passions, ambitions, and dreams. What could be more tragic than bringing a life into this world only to use it as a vessel for your own regrets, while simultaneously crushing that child's aspirations?

This is how the cycle of disappointment and emotional damage repeats itself — generation after generation.

Let's reflect on a few examples from the Seerah (Life of the Prophet ﷺ):

- **Zayd ibn Thabit (RA)** had a passion for learning languages. The Prophet ﷺ encouraged him, and he became a master translator.
- **Khalid ibn al-Walid (RA)** possessed extraordinary military insight — and went on to become one of Islam's most brilliant generals.
- **Aisha (RA)** was an intellectual powerhouse and an exceptional teacher — and the Prophet ﷺ fully supported her scholarly pursuits and leadership.

The Child Is a Trust, Not a Target

In recent times, I have frequently come across unsettling footage — videos depicting young children being subjected to violence at the hands of those entrusted with teaching them the Qur'an. What is perhaps even more alarming is that this violence is not only **tolerated** but often **justified**, both by the perpetrators and, tragically, by the parents of the children themselves.

One cannot help but pause in disbelief at the disturbing normalization of such brutality. **Applause** — literal or implied — is offered to teachers who physically discipline their students, with the justification that it is "for the child's own good." It is a bitter truth, but one that must be acknowledged: in many parts of our society, particularly in **Pakistan**, this mindset is not the exception — it is the norm.

Outside the walls of these institutions, signs are posted boldly: ***"No Violence. Teach with Love."*** Yet upon entering, one often finds a jarring contradiction. Behind those same doors, the cries of innocent children echo — not from the struggle of learning, but from the pain of being beaten into silence.

What is most tragic is not just the violence itself, but the **mentality that justifies it.** What kind of distorted thinking proclaims that striking a child is an act of care? One of my friends enlightened me to a disturbing reality — that some teachers, often regarded as our spiritual parents, justify their brutality by quoting a fabricated Hadith claiming that ***"Hellfire is forbidden for those who were once beaten by their teachers."***

I mean, how can a teacher even utter such a statement?

Which religion, nation, or culture — in its purest, most humane form — sanctions the physical punishment of children as a method of correction or instruction?

Let it be stated unequivocally: **no ideology, no belief system, no tradition truly justifies the brutality inflicted upon children.** Discipline, when rooted in wisdom and love, builds character. Violence, however, shatters spirits and sows seeds of fear, resentment, and emotional scars that often last a lifetime.

There are numerous ways to guide and nurture a child — through patience, compassion, dialogue, and example. Since when has **violence** become the preferred path to impart wisdom? When did we trade empathy for intimidation?

The Right To Live

There is a profound imbalance in how society speaks of parental rights while ignoring the **rights of the child.** The child is expected to be obedient, grateful, and reverent — and indeed, these are noble virtues. But what of the parents who once stood in prayer, tears in their eyes, pleading with Allah to grant them a child — and now that child, once a cherished hope, lives under the weight of their oppression?

How often have we seen couples visiting doctor after doctor, longing for the joy of parenthood, only to later deprive their child of love, safety, and even the most basic emotional support?

Perhaps, before seeking the gift of a child, what is urgently needed is a moment of sincere self-reflection.

One must ask:

- **Am I truly prepared to raise a child with empathy and responsibility?**
- **Can I provide not only food and shelter but also emotional security and understanding?**
- **Am I living a life of religious and moral integrity that my child can learn from? Or am I merely imposing religious rituals without embodying their spirit?**
- **Do I guide my child or control them? Do I uplift them, or do I use fear to dominate them?**
- **Can I offer genuine love, care, and a sense of protection that every child rightfully deserves?**

Because My Neighbour Had One

It is deeply troubling to witness how many people willingly take on the **enormous responsibility of bringing a child** into this world without ever pausing to reflect on whether they are truly capable—physically, emotionally, or morally—of fulfilling that role. What is even more disheartening is the justification that many couples offer when asked why they want a child. Rather than responding with purpose, conviction, or a desire to nurture and raise a human being with love and care, the answers are often shockingly shallow: **"Because everyone else is having children," "Because my in-laws say it's time," "Because my neighbour just gave birth," or "Because all our friends already have kids."**

What kind of reasoning is this? It implies that the decision to have a child—a decision that carries lifelong consequences and responsibilities—is being made based on social comparison. Unfortunately, this toxic mentality has taken deep root in our society, particularly in **Pakistan**. We are witnessing a generation of parents who are not becoming parents out of readiness or genuine desire, but because they fear falling behind in some imagined social race.

When comparison becomes the root cause of childbirth, we are no longer speaking of responsible parenting—we are speaking of negligence. Imagine, one day, your child asks you, "**Why did you bring me into this world**?" And your only answer is, "Because I wanted to prove to others that I, too, could have a child." What a shallow, painful truth that would be. It reflects a society that continues to operate on the same blind

herd mentality**: "I will follow the flock, no matter the cost."** Even when the decision involves bringing a living, breathing, feeling human into existence, people still move with the crowd.

For God's sake, spare the children. If you choose to live the rest of your life based on what others are doing— like your career, your clothing, your possessions, your home, or your phone are chosen in imitation of others—please do not apply that same flawed logic to something as sacred and irreversible as the birth of a child. It is a profound tragedy that many people treat the decision to become parents with the same mindset they use to purchase the latest popular gadget. Since everyone has an iPhone, I should have one too. Since everyone is having children, I should have one too. It sounds absurd, but sadly, it reflects a harsh and painful reality.

A child is not a material possession. A child is not an object to display in front of others as a symbol of status or conformity. A child is a full human being, with emotions, sensitivity, intelligence, and dignity. **To bring a life into this world merely to compete with others is not only irresponsible—it is cruel.** It reflects a disturbing erosion of our collective humanity. Such a decision should only be made when a person is fully prepared to raise a child with love, understanding, and intentional care. It requires the maturity to provide not only physical needs but emotional security, moral guidance, and a nurturing environment.

To reduce parenthood to a matter of social comparison is to reduce the child to nothing more than a trophy. And that, above

all, is the ultimate betrayal of the trust that comes with the gift of life.

Authority Without Accountability

Each of us is aware that our parents are fallible and capable of making mistakes. Yet, rarely does a parent admit fault or offer an apology for their actions; instead, they expect the child to be the one who says sorry**. Children are neither always right nor always wrong,** which means their perspectives deserve to be heard and considered, at the very least. It is perplexing that these kinds of authoritative parents later complain that their children are stubborn or that they grow into adults who lack tolerance and exhibit aggressive behavior. From the very beginning, what these children learn is that age and authority validate their opinions, regardless of contradictory rational evidence. Consequently, these same children grow into adults who rarely apologize for their mistakes. Regrettably, this is a lesson imparted by their parents. Children learn to be stubborn and refuse to take responsibility for their actions, even when they are clearly wrong. **The parents' conduct is the root cause of such behavior.** At this juncture, the child internalizes the belief that possessing authority or power grants one the right to justify any behavior, whether right or wrong.

"Mercy Before Obligation"

One must recognize that the bond between a parent and a child is deeply sacred—founded not upon dominance, possession, or duty, but rather **upon mercy, empathy, and unconditional affection**. If this essential connection is not nurtured during a child's formative years, the child may grow up emotionally detached, inherently mistrustful of others, and inclined to perceive the world as a hostile and indifferent place.

To elucidate this idea, consider the analogy of raising a kitten. You may diligently provide it with nourishment, shelter, and security, yet refrain from offering affection or emotional warmth. Instead, you adopt an authoritarian stance, attempting to enforce behavioral expectations through rigid discipline. Despite your efforts, the kitten grows into an adult cat without ever mastering the behavior you sought to instill. **Why?** Because what was absent from the process—compassion and emotional connection—is precisely what fosters trust, learning, and emotional development.

The same principle applies in parenting. If you wish to raise a child who is empathetic, morally upright, and emotionally intelligent, you must first model those qualities yourself. **Demonstrate what you hope to cultivate.** Children do not absorb values through instruction alone—they learn through consistent observation and imitation. If your actions contradict your teachings, your words will lose their credibility.

A common complaint among parents is**: "We teach our children moral values, yet they fail to embody them."** Often, the underlying issue is not the lack of instruction, but the

absence of congruence between parental words and actions. For example, a parent may emphasize the importance of honesty, yet when confronted with an inconvenient visitor at the door, they instruct the child to lie and say they're not home. This hypocrisy does not go unnoticed**. It teaches the child that deception is acceptable when it serves one's convenience**—thus eroding the very lesson being imparted.

Such inconsistencies have far-reaching consequences. A child raised in an environment where values are spoken but not practiced often becomes an adult who makes hollow promises, utters words devoid of intention, and engages in relationships that lack depth and endurance. **The same disconnect manifests in spiritual or religious domains as well.** Parents frequently lament their children's detachment from religion, yet fail to recognize that during their children's most impressionable years, they themselves treated religious practices as ritualistic obligations rather than heartfelt commitments. Children do not internalize what is preached; they emulate what is lived.

Imagine a bird trying to teach its fledglings to fly, while never taking flight itself. No matter how often or how passionately it urges them, they will not learn—because what is not demonstrated cannot be grasped. In the spirit of **Albert Bandura's conception of enactive learning**, behavior is not truly known until it is enacted; without demonstration, knowledge lingers as theory, never ripening into understanding. Children, too, require visible, lived examples. Without them, lessons remain abstract and ineffective.

This truth is well-supported in the realm of psychology. Consider another example from **Albert Bandura's** renowned Bobo Doll experiment. In this study, children who observed adults acting aggressively toward a doll later replicated the same aggressive behaviors when left alone with it. The takeaway is clear: human beings—especially children—learn by watching. If destructive behaviors can be acquired through observation, so too can constructive, virtuous ones—provided they are modeled consistently and authentically.

In conclusion, the formation of morally sound, emotionally secure, and socially responsible individuals begins not with instruction, but with example. Parents must embody the principles they wish to instill. Only through authentic, consistent, and compassionate behavior can children be inspired to internalize the values necessary for a meaningful and balanced life. Words may inform, but it is action that transforms.

"The Business of Babies: When Profit Replaces Bonding"

A baby, nestled in the secure comfort of the mother's womb, is abruptly introduced to a world full of unfamiliar stimuli and challenges at birth. Among the most profound of these challenges is the loss of the warmth, protection, and security previously experienced in utero. **The newborn instinctively seeks to replicate this sense of comfort**—and one of the most immediate and natural ways this is achieved is through breastfeeding.

When a mother brings her baby close to her chest, the act of suckling not only nourishes the infant physically but also provides deep emotional and psychological satisfaction. This intimate connection fosters a sense of safety and bonding that is crucial during the earliest stages of life.

Regrettably, in contemporary society, **breastfeeding is increasingly being overlooked or replaced.** A widespread and misguided belief suggests that breast milk alone is insufficient to meet an infant's nutritional needs—an entirely unfounded assertion. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), exclusive breastfeeding is sufficient to fulfill all nutritional requirements of an infant for the first six months of life. Beyond this period, complementary semi-solid foods may be gradually introduced, while continuing breastfeeding.

Babies deprived of this fundamental experience often face long-term psychological consequences. The absence of breastfeeding does not merely equate to the denial of

nutrition—it also withholds a child's inherent right to comfort, emotional security, and physical closeness.

This truth is underscored by one of the most iconic experiments in the history of developmental psychology: the Harlow monkey experiment. **Psychologist Harry Harlow** constructed two surrogate mother figures—one made of cold, hard wire that dispensed food and water, and another covered in soft cloth but offering no nourishment. When given the choice, infant monkeys consistently clung to the soft surrogate, despite its inability to feed them. This compelling finding illustrates that warmth, security, and emotional comfort outweigh even the most basic physical needs, such as food, in early development.

If such a preference exists in animals, it is even more pronounced in humans, beings with far more complex emotional and cognitive structures. The need for maternal closeness, affection, and physical warmth is hardwired into human nature.

Furthermore, the **commercial baby formula industry** introduces a host of additional concerns. Many formula products contain harmful preservatives, synthetic additives, and questionable chemicals that may impair cognitive and physical development. Despite marketing claims boasting formulas "enriched" with vitamins, minerals, and calcium, the reality is that many of these products are laden with potentially toxic substances. The industry often prioritizes profit over the well-being of infants, going so far as to suppress voices that challenge their narratives or reveal inconvenient truths.

Therefore, breastfeeding is far more than a nutritional act—it is a foundational experience that fosters emotional resilience, secure attachment, and holistic development. While infant formula may have its place in rare medical circumstances, it should never be promoted as an equal or superior substitute. To deny a child the right to breastfeeding is to deprive them not only of optimal nutrition but also of the emotional nourishment that forms the very basis of human connection.

Unwanted from Birth

Imagine being told that ***you are nothing but a burden***—and hearing it not from a stranger, but from the very people you love most: **your parents**. Painful as it may sound, this is a sentiment echoed far too often, especially among girls in many parts of Asia. It is tragically common to witness disappointment surrounding the birth of a daughter. So prevalent is this mindset that **even gynecologists often withhold the gender of the fetus,** fearing the consequences the mother might face if the unborn child is revealed to be female.

How utterly heartbreaking—and shameful—it is to perceive daughters as burdens, particularly when one reflects on the profound truth that the noble lineage of **our beloved Prophet** (peace be upon him) continued through a daughter. And yet, despite such examples, societal attitudes remain deeply flawed. Across the continent, girls are denied their most basic rights—most critically, the right to education.

How can a child, conditioned to believe she is a burden, ever be expected to flourish or realize her true potential? It is soul-crushing to see stories, now rampant on social media, of infant girls being abandoned by their own families. And this is in the year 2025—a so-called era of progress, of technological and intellectual advancement. Yet our thinking remains regressive, archaic, and, frankly, beneath even that of animals**. For you will never find an animal rejecting its young for being female**. They do not discriminate. And yet, we—the so-called superior species—do.

To grow up with the internalized belief that your mere existence is a burden is to live with a quiet, aching shame. You feel guilty for being fed, for having a roof over your head, for simply existing. Time and again, I have asked young girls: ***"Why do you aspire to become something in life?"*** And their answers are hauntingly similar: ***"To ease our parents' burden."***

Born into Bias

A widely entrenched belief across various parts of Asia is that the firstborn child is often considered the most cherished, while the youngest is perceived as either an accident or an unwanted addition. **Parental favouritism** stands as one of the primary catalysts for **resentment and emotional estrangement** within families. It significantly undermines the foundation of familial unity and creates fragile, superficial bonds.

It is not uncommon to hear parents assert, ***"This is my favourite child; he or she is capable of achieving anything,"*** while the other child is dismissed, regardless of how earnestly they strive for approval. It is, in fact, the parents who lay the groundwork for **hostility, bias, and internalised discrimination** among their children.

The child subjected to neglect, despite repeated efforts to gain recognition, is continually overlooked. Over time, such a child often cultivates a belief that their choices—whether virtuous or misguided—are irrelevant, for they will never earn the validation they so deeply seek from their parents.

One may have encountered news stories of siblings turning on each other—sometimes even with fatal consequences. But who bears the true responsibility for such devastation? The child who was emotionally marginalised for years, or the adult who was conditioned to uphold and act upon discriminatory affection?

The judgment is yours to make.

In my opinion, **favouritism is one of the most insidious and destructive instruments** a parent can unconsciously wield—

transforming a home into a battleground. By the time its consequences are realised, it is often far too late to repair the emotional damage. Therefore, it is prudent for parents to abstain entirely from adopting such a divisive and harmful practice.

Imperfect, Therefore, Human

Children—particularly in Asia—are subjected to immense psychological and physical distress due to the relentless pursuit of academic perfection, a standard often imposed by their own parents. The belief that being a **"topper"** guarantees lifelong success has become so deeply ingrained that many children are driven to the brink. They are relentlessly pressured, sometimes to the extent that they tragically choose to end their own lives.

Is this truly the path to success, or a descent toward despair and destruction?

I have witnessed harrowing cases where exam-induced anxiety led to **heart failure**, and where the fear of parental humiliation over a low score culminated in **suicide**. Of course, discipline and dedication are essential for achievement—but burdening a child with the expectation of flawlessness is both cruel and unrealistic. I have seen parents express disappointment even when their child scores 99 out of 100, insisting that "perfection" is the only acceptable outcome.

Then comes the toxic comparison:
"Look at the neighbour's child—they scored a perfect 100. Why can't you?"
Well, that same neighbour bought a new house—why haven't you?

It is a fundamental truth that ***absolute perfection belongs solely to Allah Almighty.*** We are His creation—flawed by nature. So why impose divine expectations on human children?

Ironically, the same parents who are ungrateful for their child's accomplishments later complain that their children are ungrateful for their blessings. But where did they learn such ingratitude? From their very own upbringing. They were taught that even if you possess 99 blessings out of 100, it is the **missing one that defines your worth**. They were conditioned to compare, to chase what they lack, and to dismiss what they already have.

Eventually, these parents are left in isolation, lamenting, ***"Our children turned out to be ungrateful."*** But the root of the problem lies in their own flawed definition of success—equating it with unattainable perfection.

This is how society has become so deeply materialistic: we are raised to covet what we don't possess, rather than to cherish what we do. It is disheartening to say, but even **animals do not demand absolute perfection from their offspring**—because they instinctively understand what many humans do not: **perfection is not only unrealistic, it is inhuman**.

For God's sake, parents—temper your expectations.
Your child is not required to be perfect.
Show them compassion. Let them breathe.

“Stop Using Babies to Save Marriages”

One of the most damaging remedies often prescribed to mend a broken marriage is the decision to have children. You might have heard elders say, ***"If your marriage isn’t working, have a child — it will bring you closer."*** But what kind of reasoning is that, and what ideology is it rooted in?

A couple who cannot satisfy one another emotionally or physically, who cannot tolerate each other's presence, who have never truly understood or known each other — a couple that lacks mutual respect, love, and compatibility, that believes they were never meant to be together — how can they assume that **bringing a child into this chaos will resolve everything?** These are people who haven't addressed the root causes of their issues, who haven’t sought counseling, developed understanding, or even considered a graceful separation, and yet, out of nowhere, they decide to bring a new life into the world — hoping that a dependent, innocent human being will somehow fix the problems they themselves have failed to confront.

How can a child — entirely reliant on their parents — mend wounds that only mature dialogue, empathy, and intentional healing can resolve?

The consequences of such a decision are, unsurprisingly, disastrous. If two individuals haven't learned to be emotionally available to each other, **how can they possibly be available to their child?** That child often grows up developing distorted attachment styles because instead of filling a void, they become another casualty of it. They sense the emotional absence of their

parents, not just toward them but toward each other — especially during times of distress. As a result, that child often distances themselves from the family, emotionally and psychologically, having learned that connection and support are more likely to come from strangers than their own blood.

So please — don't bring another human being into the world to fill your emptiness. A child cannot fix a relationship that the adults themselves haven't committed to healing. That internal void will remain until you confront the reality of your relationship with your spouse. And if such couples later claim, ***"We only stayed together because of the kids — otherwise, we would've separated,"*** imagine the emotional burden placed on the child who grows up in such an environment. What kind of adult are they likely to become?

A Forbidden Child

"You are nothing more than a mistake; you came by accident."

Perhaps the most devastating statement one could ever hear — words capable of shattering a soul like nothing else. How can one even begin to comprehend the pain of a child raised under the weight of such phrases?

A child who grows up knowing that their existence was nothing more than an accident — knowing they were unwanted, unplanned, and, even worse, that their parents once tried to abort them. I cannot adequately express in words the depth of the wound this knowledge inflicts: **the agony of realizing that your parents had already given up on you** before you even began to live, that they were unwilling to tolerate your very existence. Perhaps, in their eyes, you were a forbidden child.

Although I have explained many scenarios using examples, this particular one defies explanation**. No language can fully capture the torment of feeling unwanted** — it tears you apart and shatters you in ways that cannot be imagined. Imagine existing in a world where your very being was never desired by your own parents.

My humble suggestion to parents is this: even if you conceived a child accidentally or mistakenly, even if their birth was unplanned, and even if you once attempted to abort them — please, keep this knowledge between you and your partner. **Do not, under any circumstances, let the child know, not even on your deathbed.** This is not something they would ever want to hear; it will not make them stronger. Instead, it will plunge

them into unimaginable existential crisis, emotional turmoil, and excruciating pain.

And to anyone who has ever heard these words — I am truly sorry. But remember this: **your Lord chose your existence, and His love for you surpasses all else in this world.**

Covert Narcissistic Parenting: The Silent Epidemic

Have you ever felt like your parents go out of their way to present themselves as the ideal parents in front of others—claiming they've never burdened you, or that they treat you with the utmost care—when, in reality, they are emotionally unavailable, distant, and cold?
Sorry to break it to you, but **that's covert narcissistic parenting—a dynamic that is alarmingly prevalent across much of Asia.**

Such parents exert control over their children as effortlessly as flipping through television channels with a remote. They engage in emotional manipulation, particularly when confronted with rational arguments. Rather than acknowledging their behavior, they deflect by saying, ***"After everything I've done for you, is this how you choose to repay us?"***

Ever heard your mother respond with, ***"Do whatever you want,"*** when you ask for permission? That phrase, in truth, is a veiled *no*—**a passive-aggressive tactic** meant to assert control while appearing permissive.

And **love?** It's conditional. If you follow their rules and meet their expectations, affection is granted. If not, you're branded a disappointment. When you bring up the subject of emotional availability, they dismiss it entirely, claiming such needs don't exist or that you're **simply "too sensitive."**

You may notice them being overly courteous and warm toward other children, but when it comes to you, the household

transforms into a war zone. This is arguably the most damaging parenting style—one silently embraced by billions.

A child growing up in such an environment often feels suffocated, without understanding the root cause. They experience a constant sense of unease without any visible trigger. On the surface, everything may appear normal, but beneath it all—much like cancer silently consuming healthy cells—their emotional well-being is being eroded from within.

As a result, you'll often encounter children who resemble the walking dead**: lifeless inside, merely functioning outside—** because their home is nothing short of an emotional apocalypse.

General Guidelines:

Lastly, you can seek profound guidance from Islamic teachings on how to nurture and raise a child. Study the **Seerah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)**, especially his interactions with children, to understand the embodiment of love, gentleness, and wisdom in parenting.

Moreover, in today's world, with the advancement of technology, **access to literature** has become significantly easier. Therefore, before stepping into parenthood, read well-regarded and insightful parenting books. Additionally, consult **a certified parenting coach** or trainer. Undergo basic psychological evaluations to assess whether you are truly prepared to raise a child or not. If you identify any emotional unrest or unresolved issues within yourself, address them first.

Parenthood is a profound and delicate responsibility. Learn to be compassionate with your child. Your child is wholly dependent on your mercy, and you are their primary role model. Therefore, **cultivate in yourself the very traits and virtues you wish to see reflected in them.** Uphold religious and moral values, as observation is the most powerful form of learning for a child.

Positively reinforce their good behavior. When children make mistakes, refrain from using abusive or harsh language. Avoid physical punishment altogether. Instead, guide them with empathy and tenderness. If they throw a temper tantrum, respond with calmness and gentle direction. Adopt **strategies like time-outs or employ the token system.** If you want them to learn a specific behavior, provide them with a structured

pathway to earn tokens, and upon completion, reward them with something meaningful.

Be emotionally present for them. Create a safe and open space for them to share their thoughts and feelings. Foster a nurturing environment that allows them to grow and thrive. **Address any marital conflicts privately — away from the child's awareness.** Avoid comparing them to others, and resist the urge to criticize. Offer them unconditional positive regard. Allow them the autonomy to choose their own career path and life goals.

Let go of ego; **apologize when you are wrong.** Be sincere and transparent with them. Explain the consequences of their actions with patience and clarity.

Teach your child how to establish healthy boundaries and regulate their emotions. Do not burden them with unrealistic, fantasy-driven expectations.

And above all — **be the kind of person you wish your child to become.**

THANK YOU FOR READING